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Letters To The Editor*Whose Figures D'Ye Read?*

A recent CIA report estimates that "the Soviet Gross National Product (GNP) rose only about 2.5 per cent in '62 and '63 while the GNP in the U.S. went up 5 per cent." This seems to indicate that the gap between us gets wider all the time and is a most comfortable conclusion indeed.

The Soviet Union on the other hand uses comparative Industrial Production (IP) figures and claims that they are progressing almost twice as fast as we are. They contend that in 1961 their IP was 60 per cent of ours whereas in 1963 it was 65 per cent. Bear in mind that both are talking about the same two years.

Fantastic as it may seem

both sets of figures may well be approximately correct. Conceivably, they could (as planned) reach 75 per cent of our IP by the end of 1965; 100 per cent by 1968; 120 per cent by 1970; and (now hold your breath) 220 per cent by 1980; while at one and the same time our GNP might continue to gain on theirs. The key to this seemingly impossible paradox is that the CIA and the USSR are actually talking about two entirely different things.

Henry J. Taylor pointed out in his column recently that even haircuts are included in our GNP. Other items that are two to many times higher here than there are subway fares, rent, advertising, books, interest charges, scholastic tuition, medical care etc., etc. All of these going up here and down there. As a matter of fact the Soviets consider GNP figures meaningless and do not bother to compile them.

Our "guesstimates" may be close enough however and they most assuredly do provide us with the mental tranquilizers all too many of us

seem to need. Whether they should be swallowed whole or with liberal quantities of salt is open to question. As for the Industrial Production figures these include the production of coal, oil, pig iron, steel, aluminum, machine tools, chemicals, electricity, etc.; that is production for industry, as the name implies. Services of all kinds are not included here or there, nor is agriculture, and of course it is their agricultural production that is giving them their biggest headaches right now.

A confirmed optimist will say to all this that we are still producing industrially half again as much as the Soviet Union — and could produce more, and he would be right. The more pessimistically inclined would respond that only ten years ago in 1953 we produced three times as much. Then the pessimist would look at USSR plans for the future and wish that we had some of our own. Which of these groupings are being realistic?

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